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ABSTRACT

Responses of 100 parents, 30 teachers, and over 200 preschool children were used to evaluate the effectiveness of a child sexual abuse prevention curriculum for preschool children. An orientation meeting for parents and teachers preceded a presentation of the curriculum to preschool children. Parents and teachers were already aware of child sexual abuse as a problem and were accurate in their knowledge. After participating in the curriculum, young children were able to identify feelings, were able to say what to do in a case of abuse, and were able to identify private body areas. Parents and teachers responded positively to the curriculum, specifically citing the value of basic knowledge about child sexual abuse and the learning of language skills, e.g., the permission to say "no." (Author/CL)

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PROTECTING YOUNG CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

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ABSTRACT

Responses of parents, teachers, and young children were used to evaluate the effectiveness of a child sexual abuse prevention curriculum for preschool children. An orientation meeting for parents and teachers preceded a presentation of the curriculum to preschool children. Parents and teachers were already aware of child sexual abuse as a problem and were accurate in their knowledge. After participating in the curriculum, young children were able to identify feelings, were able to say what to do in a case of abuse, and were able to identify private body areas. Parents and teachers responded positively to the curriculum.

Key Words:

child sexual abuse, parent-child relations, preschool children, prevention curriculum, sexual abuse prevention, teacher-child relations, young children

Greater awareness of the sexual abuse of young children is beginning to create a body of literature dedicated to its investigation and prevention. It is generally agreed that child sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of a child in which the offender has more power than the child. The child may not be developmentally able to understand or resist the contact and may be psychologically and socially dependent upon the offender (McFaddin, 1982; Sanford, 1980). An estimated 30 to 46 percent of all children in the United States are sexually abused before the age of 18 years (King County Rape Relief, 1979).

Common misconceptions about children's sexual contact with adults often prevent the recognition and reporting of child sexual abuse. These include beliefs that children lie or fantasize about sexual contact with adults, that children enjoy, provoke, or are partially responsible for sexual contact with adults, and that non-violent sexual abuse is not emotionally traumatic. Such misconceptions project the child as instigating the sexual contact, but when sexual abuse occurs, it is not the child's fault. The responsibility lies with the sexual offender (Sanford, 1980).

Children are generally warned to be careful about strangers. Also, they are not taught that it is acceptable to say "no" to an adult who touches them inappropriately. In reality, the sexual offender is known to the child in 85 percent of cases (King County Rape Relief, 1979). Children often do not know who to tell or how to explain if they are a victim of sexual abuse. Parents and teachers need to know the characteristics of sexual abuse, and children need to be taught skills to prevent sexual abuse.

The identification and prevention of child sexual abuse is dependent upon the willingness and ability of both adults and children to recognize the possibility that the condition exists.

The development and evaluation of a curriculum for the prevention of child sexual abuse at the preschool level is an important development in the area of child and family studies. Young children are particularly at risk because they trust adults, they get most of their information about the world from adults, they are taught to obey adults, and are often eager to please adults. Appropriate materials provided by parents and teachers are essential to the prevention of sexual abuse. Future studies into the effectiveness of prevention programs will help to clairfy the most useful methods of prevention.

Efforts to educate children about sexual abuse have been directed almost exclusively at school-age children. Very few resources exist that are specifically designed to meet the needs of younger children. "Feelings and Your Body: A Prevention Curriculum for Preschoolers" was developed to meet this need (McFaddin, 1982). This 1982 report was used as a guide in the development of a modified presentation for young children still called "Feelings and Your Body". The effectiveness of the curriculum in the prevention of child sexual abuse is the subject of the present study.

The project described in this paper was designed to educate children and adults about child sexual abuse, and specifically to develop and evaluate the use of a sexual abuse prevention curriculum with preschool-age children. The response of parents, teachers, and children was evaluated as well as was the effectiveness of the curriculum in the development of skills needed to help prevent sexual abuse.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

"Feelings and Your Body: A Prevention Curriculum for Preschoolers" was presented as a group activity for about twenty minutes on three or four consecutive days. A combination of activities, stories, songs, and drama was used in the presentations. The objectives of the prevention curriculum addressed three major groups, namely children, parents, and teachers. The objectives are listed below:

1. Children are able to:
   - Recognize and trust feelings and senses
   - Demonstrate assertiveness skills
   - Name family, school and community support persons
   - Identify "good" and "bad" touch
   - Identify private body areas
   - Recognize that children have a right to body privacy
   - Say "no" to touch they don't like
   - Know how to tell about a touching problem
   - Identify problem situations
   - Know that sexual abuse in not the child's fault
2. Parents are able to:
   - Demonstrate basic knowledge about sexual abuse
   - Accept the importance of teaching children about sexual abuse
   - Talk to their children about sexual abuse using simple, non-threatening language
   - Respect the child's right to say no to unwanted touch
   - Understand that a child who tells about sexual abuse is to be believed

Understand that 85 percent of the time, the offender is a friend or relative

Accept that sexual abuse is not the child's fault

Understand that an offense should be reported immediately to appropriate authorities

3. Teachers are able to:

Demonstrate basic knowledge about sexual abuse

Present this curriculum to future groups of children

Identify behavioral characteristics of sexually abused children

Believe a child who discloses sexual abuse and then to make a report to appropriate agencies

Provide support and advocacy to a child victim

These objectives were the basis for the development of instruments used to evaluate the effectiveness of the sexual abuse prevention curriculum.

Initial presentations followed the outline of the curriculum essentially as it was written in "Feelings and Your Body: A Prevention Curriculum for Preschoolers" (McFaddin, 1982). However, the curriculum was modified soon after the initial presentations. The changes were made to match more accurately the presentation of the curriculum to the developmental level of preschool children. The suggestions for these changes came from parents, teachers, and early childhood professionals. Major changes included condensing the material from five to three days, eliminating many of the media elements, eliminating the story books not directly related to the prevention of child sexual abuse, and adding anatomically correct dolls to demonstrate good and bad touch and to teach private areas. A song was written and added to the curriculum. This modified curriculum

was shorter and more precise than the original version, yet it included the same concepts. The revised version of the curriculum is outlined below:

Day One	(20 minutes)	Discussion based on "Feeling Faces" (pictures of faces expressing feeling happy, sad, mad, confused, scared, silly). Story, It's My Body (Freeman, 1982). Song, "When I Like the Way You Touch Me" (Morgan, 1983).
Day Two	(30 minutes)	Discussion of good and bad touch. Story of Jimmy (private areas named and practice saying "no"). Play, "It's Hard to Say No to Somebody Big" (Kleven, 1983).
Day Three	(20 minutes)	Discussion and review. Play, "Jimmy's Bedtime Story" (Kleven, 1983). Song, "When I Like the Way You Touch Me", (Morgan, 1983).

METHOD

Subjects

"Feelings and Your Body" was presented to children, parents, and teachers of 25 full- and part-day programs for young children in Whatcom County, Washington. The programs included private family day care homes and

preschools, a Native American Headstart program, a day-treatment program, a university laboratory program, and several community college programs including day care and parent-cooperatives. Parents and teachers were invited to participate in an orientation meeting as well as in the curriculum presentations.

The subjects were from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Both single and dual parent households were represented. Over 200 children aged two to seven years, approximately 100 parents, and 30 teachers participated in the presentations during the 1983-84 school year.

Presentation

Directors of programs for young children in Bellingham and Whatcom County, Washington were contacted to schedule presentations. Many directors themselves arranged for presentations, and none of the programs contacted refused to participate. The curriculum was presented from October, 1983 through May, 1984.

Orientation meetings were arranged for the week before the presentation of the curriculum. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a general overview of the information available about child sexual abuse, to inform the parents and teachers about the curriculum that would be presented to their children, and to provide opportunity for questions and concerns to be raised. Questionnaires were distributed at the meeting to collect information concerning objectives for parents and teachers.

In the next week, the curriculum was presented to the children at their preschool. On the first day of the presentation, the project director and

an assistant worked individually with each child on an activity booklet. Each child was asked to place a sticker on the picture in the booklet that represented a particular concept from the information taught in the curriculum. This activity took approximately two to five minutes per child and was treated as a pretest. After the pretesting was completed, the group of children was called together for the presentation. Group size ranged from six to eight children. At the end of the curriculum presentations, the children were again asked to do the activity which was used as a posttest.

Parents and teachers were interviewed by telephone at the end of the year in order to evaluate their feelings about the curriculum after it had been presented to the children. Parents and teachers responded to yes/no and open choice items in the interviews.

Instruments

The questionnaire, interview, and children's activity were developed to evaluate the degree to which the project objectives were reached. The instruments had two evaluative functions, summative and formative. The summative instruments asked participants for specific knowledge or personal attitudes, and the formative instruments asked the participants for their feelings and perceptions about the curriculum after its completion. The instruments and their roles are shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The parent and teacher questionnaires were completed by the parents before and after the orientation meeting. There were two sets of question-

naires--one for parents and one for teachers. These had many similar items. There were also two forms (A and B) of the questionnaire, one for before and one for after the meeting. The A and B forms were similar, using different wording on only a few of the items. The parent and teacher questionnaires were revised once early in the project to adjust wording of items and to add and drop an item. The original and revised versions were used in the data analysis where possible. This resulted in one item with a smaller sample size. The revised version of the parent questionnaire consisted of 10 items, the teacher questionnaire consisted of 11 items. Both were limited to "yes" or "no" responses.

The parent and teacher interviews were conducted after all presentations had been completed. A university student working for course credit, contacted by telephone as many parents and teachers of the children who participated in the curriculum as possible. The telephone interview form consisted of nine items. These were open-ended questions or "yes" or "no" questions. Responses were recorded during each telehpone interview. Q methodology was used to sort the responses to the open-ended questions (Kerlinger, 1973).

The children's activity consisted of three parts. The first part consisted of six sets of six drawings representing the feelings of happy, sad, mad, confused, scared, and silly. For each set of pictures, children were asked to place a sticker on a picture that represented a particular feeling. For the second part of the activity, children were told a short story in which an adult touched a child in an inappropriate manner. Two stories which were similar were used, one for the pretest and one for the posttest.

Children were asked how the child felt and what the child could do. Their responses were written in the activity booklet. The third part of the activity required the children to place stickers on the private areas of two children in bathing suits in a drawing. Children could use as many stickers as they needed for this task.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed for 171 children aged two to seven years. Ninety-six parents and 11 teachers completed the questionnaires at the orientation meetings, and 94 parents and four teachers responded to the telephone interview. The parents, teachers, and children represented 16 different preschool programs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe data characteristics.

Summative Evaluation

The summative evaluation consists of data collected through the use of a questionnaire for the adults (i.e., parents and teachers) and an activity for the children. The questionnaire and activity each consisted of items which could be considered correct/incorrect, or appropriate/inappropriate. The percent of correct and incorrect responses of parents to the items on the questionnaire are presented in Table 2. Teachers responded to a questionnaire that was similar to the parent questionnaire. The responses of the teachers are presented in Table 3. Two items on each questionnaire were dropped from analysis because of low sample size and inadequate comparison.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 About Here

In the analysis of data from the young children who participated in the sexual abuse prevention curriculum, it was found that most of the children could identify feelings such as mad, happy, sad, scared, and silly; however most children could not identify "confused". Children were more accurate in their identification of confused and each of the other feelings after participating in the curriculum presentation. Table 4 contains the results of the pre- and posttest activity. After hearing a story about child sexual abuse, a majority of children responded appropriately after participating in the curriculum. In response to the task of identifying private areas on a girl and boy dressed in bathing suits on a beach, 88 percent of the children were able to correctly identify one or more private areas. Of these children, 4 percent identified one area, 29 percent identified two areas, and 56 percent identified three (i.e., girl's genital area, boy's genital area, girl's breast area).

Insert Table 4 About Here

Formative Evaluation

A telephone interview was conducted after the presentations had been completed. Of the 98 parents and teachers contacted, 59 had attended the orientation meeting, and 49 had attended some portion of the curriculum with their child.

The responses of the parents and teachers are reported in Table 5. Data for parents and teachers were combined because few teachers could be reached after programs closed for the summer. Missing data were not included when

calculating the percentages. Two or three responses were missing for each item.

Insert Table 5 About Here

Other Observations

As a part of the evaluation, an interview was conducted with the person who presented the curriculum to the preschool programs. In the course of the interview, changes which occurred in the curriuclum over the course of the project were described. The changes are outlined in the previous section on Curriculum Development.

Parents' participation was described as being generally supportive. There were a few parents who were concerned about the appropriateness of the sexual abuse subject matter for young children. Teachers appeared to be observant and evaluative. Teachers tended to become more supportive of the project toward the end of the curriculum presentations.

The children's participation was described as interested and involved. They seemed to enjoy the activities in which they could participate such as stories with questions, drama, and songs. They were less receptive to activities in which they had to just watch or listen (e.g., films). The person who presented the curriculum described examples of how children reacted to the curriculum at home or school after participating in the presentation. These focused on comments about what they learned, increased questioning about sexuality, bodies, and touching, and increased autonomous behavior including saying "no".

One suggestion for the future was attention to the issue of how to help a child victim who is present at the curriculum presentation. The child victim might be known or discovered through participation in the curriculum. Another suggestion was to clarify the role of the curriculum presenter as one of classroom visitor, consultant, or teacher trainer. In addition, the need for increased attention to teacher training was recognized.

DISCUSSION

The responses of parents and teachers indicated that most of them knew basic information about child sexual abuse before attending the orientation meeting. Both parents and teachers agreed with the following concepts:

1. Most of the time sexual abuse is committed by a family member, family friend, or neighbor.
2. Young children should not be taught always to obey adults.
3. Young children are not responsible or partially to blame for sexual abuse.
4. Young children will be safer if taught about sexual abuse.
5. Young children have a right to say no to unwanted touch.
6. If I knew of a case of sexual abuse, I would report it to the appropriate authorities.

They were less confident about:

1. A child is often sexually abused over a long period of time.
2. Children should be believed when they report sexual abuse (considering that a child might lie to get back at someone or have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fantasy). This was true for parents only. Teachers were confident that children should be believed.

Changes observed in responses before and after the orientation meeting indicate that the program provided additional information for some of the parents.

Most parents and teachers knew basic information about child sexual abuse. They knew this information before attending the orientation meeting as evidenced by their correct responses to the questionnaire before the meeting began. Generally, responses increased in accuracy after the subjects had participated in the orientation meeting (Tables 2 and 3).

Teachers were asked whether they felt confident about their ability to identify child behaviors associated with sexual abuse and their ability to provide support for a child victim. Their initial responses indicated a lack of confidence in these areas. Their responses after the orientation meeting showed a higher confidence level (Table 3).

The curriculum held the interest of the children, and the children seemed to enjoy participating. The children learned to identify "confusing" as well as other feelings. They learned how to respond if presented with a situation in which an adult touches them in a confusing or inappropriate manner and to identify private areas of children's bodies (Table 4).

Parents were interested in the curriculum presentation, and many parents attended with their children. Both parents and teachers used very positive words to describe their feelings about the curriculum. They believed that the program had an impact on the children and that it did not frighten them or cause problems.

Parents and teachers felt that the basic knowledge about child sexual abuse, the learning of language skills, e.g., the permission to say "no",

the encouragement of autonomy, and specific materials used in the curriculum were particularly valuable. Many felt that the curriculum was excellent the way it was presented, and that no changes were needed. Some had specific suggestions for changes in materials such as to leave out the film, provide words to the song or suggestions to continue or to use more of a particular element of the curriculum (Table 5). Several of these changes were made during the year to increase the attention of the young children.

Despite limitations, it is clear that support exists for a sexual abuse prevention curriculum for preschool age children. Parents, teachers, and children were able to learn skills to use in protecting against sexual abuse.

A number of issues arise from the implementation of a sexual abuse curriculum for young children. One of these is the continuation and improvement of the curriculum content itself. Most of the objectives for children, parents, and teachers were met, however the objective that teachers be trained to present the curriculum to future groups of children was not achieved. The issue of whether a sexual abuse curriculum should be presented by the children's teachers in a preschool program or by a visiting professional with expertise in the area of sexual abuse is presently unresolved.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the effectiveness of the curriculum in preventing child sexual abuse over time must be evaluated. Will the children who were involved in the present program be able to protect themselves from abuse in the future? It is probable that the information

from the curriculum needs to be reviewed periodically in order to ensure that the children maintain prevention skills. A longitudinal study on the impact of the curriculum is needed. Similarly, it is important to determine the long-term impact the curriculum may have on parents and teachers of young children. Future studies are needed to identify the most effective methods of prevention considering both the short-term and long-term outcomes for children and families.

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Table 1. *Evaluative Functions of Instruments*

Summative	Formative
Parent Questionnaire (before and after the orientation meeting)	Parent Interview (follow-up by telephone)
Teacher Questionnaire (before and after the orientation meeting)	Teacher Interview (follow-up by telephone)
Children's Activity (before and after the curriculum presentation)	Children's Observations (was planned, but not implemented)

Table 2. Responses to Parent Questionnaire

		Percent of Correct Responses Pretest N=117	Posttest N=96
1.	Most of the time, sexual abuse is committed by a family member, friend or neighbor	98	97
2.	A child is often sexually abused many times over a long period of time	73	94
* 3.	Children should be taught always to obey adults (false) N=94	82	87
* 4.	Children sometimes lie about sexual abuse (false) N=86/72	64	96
5.	Children are sometimes partially responsible for sexual abuse (false)	97	98
6.	Children will be safer if we teach them about sexual abuse	93	98
7.	Children have a right to say "no" to unwanted touch	100	100
8.	If I knew of a case of sexual abuse, I would report it to the appropriate authorities	96	98

* Item was included only on second version of questionnaire.

Table 3. Responses to Teacher Questionnaire

	Percent of Correct Responses Pretest N=12	Posttest N-11
1. Most of the time, sexual abuse is committed by a family member, friend or neighbor	100	91
2. A child is often sexually abused many times over a long period of time	83	91
3. Children should be taught always to obey adults (false)	92	100
4. Children sometimes lie about sexual abuse (false)	100	91
5. Children will be safer if we teach them about sexual abuse	100	91
6. As a teacher, I feel confident that I could provide the support and advocacy needed by a child victim	75	91
7. Children have the right to say "no" to unwanted touch	100	100
8. As a teacher, I feel confident that I can be sensitive to the behavior changes of children who have been sexually abused	50	82
9. If I knew of a case of sexual abuse, I would report it to the appropriate authorities	100	100

Table 4. Responses to Children's Activity

Item	Percent of Correct Responses	
	Pretest	Posttest
Feelings		
Mad	87	92
Happy	95	96
Confused	37	79
Sad	85	90
Scared	61	81
Silly	57	84
Story Responses		
How did the child feel?	47	82
What could the child do?	39	88
Private Areas	37	88

Table 5. Responses of Parents and Teachers to Telephone Interview

1. How do you feel about the curriculum?

Outstanding	84.5%
Good with Suggestions	9.5%
Don't Know	3.0%
Ambivalent	3.0%

2. Do you feel more comfortable discussing sexual abuse with your child?

Yes	60.0%
Not Uncomfortable Before	27.0%
Maybe/About the Same	3.0%
No	10.0%

3. Do you feel that the program had an impact on your child?

Yes	81.0%
Don't Know	14.0%
No, Aware Before	2.0%
No	3.0%

4. Do you feel that the curriculum frightened your child or caused any problems?

No	94.0%
Don't Know	1.0%
Yes	5.0%

5. What changes would you suggest?

Nothing	45.0%
Don't Know	28.0%
Specific Suggestions	27.0%

6. What was particularly valuable about the curriculum?

Awareness of Problem	27.0%
Language Skills/Vocabulary	13.0%
Autonomy/Saying "No"	13.0%
Touching/Private Areas	13.0%
Materials Used (dolls, song)	12.0%
Parent Involvement	7.0%
All Valuable	7.0%
Don't Know	7.0%
No Comment	1.0%

7. Additional Comments

Various (These included praise and specific suggestions.)	51.0%
None	48.0%
Don't Know	1.0%